

Spring Awakening

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Frank Wedekind

Translated by Tom Osborn



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CHARACTERS

GIRLS	WENDLA BERGMANN MARTHA THEA ILSE
BOYS	MELCHIOR GABOR MORITZ STIEFEL HANS RILOW ERNST ROBEL LAMMERMEIER GEORG
BOYS IN A REFORMATORY	DIETHELM RUPRECHT HELMUTH REINHOLD
PARENTS	MRS BERGMANN MRS GABOR JUDGE GABOR MR STIEFEL
TEACHERS	RECTOR PROFESSOR CORONA RADIATA PROFESSOR BREAKNECK PROFESSOR TONGUETWISTER PROFESSOR TOTAL LOSS PROFESSOR STRYCHNINE
OTHER GROWN-UPS	PASTOR HIRSUTE PORTER SCHNELL SUPERINTENDENT PROCRUSTES LOCKSMITH DOCTOR THE MAN IN THE MASK

The scenes take place in a provincial town in Germany from spring to winter 1892.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(A living room. WENDLA and MRS BERGMANN are trying on a new dress)

WENDLA: But it's so long, Mamma. Why have you made it so long?

MRS B: You are fourteen now, Wendla.

WENDLA: Well, I don't want to be fourteen – not if it means you're going to make me a dress like this.

MRS B: I don't think it's too long at all. We can't help it, darling, if you must grow another two inches each year. You can't go on wearing a little girl's frock now you're growing up.

WENDLA: I think my little girl's frock goes much better than this. Do let me wear it once more, just one more summer. Look at this thing, the way it trails along the ground – it's a sack... sackcloth... Can't we hang it away till my next birthday? It'll fit just as well. I'd only step on the hem and tear it.

MRS B: I don't know what to say. You know I'd like you to be always just as you are now, my darling. So many girls are fat and awkward at your age – but not you... And what will you be like when the others just grow out of it?

WENDLA: Who knows? Perhaps I won't even be here at all.

MRS B: Wendla, where do you get these thoughts...

WENDLA: They're not sad, Mamma.

MRS B: *(Kissing her)* My sweet love.

WENDLA: It's at night they come, when I lie awake. I don't feel at all sad when I think them, and afterwards – I sleep well. Is it wrong, Mamma, to think about things like that?

MRS B: Well, we'll put your sack away, then, and you can change back into your little girl's frock. I can make it longer just nicely sometime by sewing a flounce on round the edge.

WENDLA: Oh no, if you're going to do that I want to be a lot bigger, at least twenty.

MRS B: Just so you don't get cold. I know this used to be quite long on you...

WENDLA: Cold now, with the spring here? Are you frightened I'll catch a chill in the knees, Mamma? That's feeble. You don't feel the cold at my age – 'specially not your legs. And being too warm would be just as bad. Who knows – one day I'll pull my sleeves off too – you'll see me in the twilight – bare feet and my legs bare... If I ever wear my sackcloth – I'll be a fairy queen underneath. Don't be cross, Mamma, no one will be able to see a thing, then.

SCENE TWO

(Sunday evening. MELCHIOR, MORITZ, HANS, ERNST, GEORG, and LAMMERMEIER.)

MELCHIOR: I'm bored with this. I'm stopping.

GEORG: Then we'll have to stop too. Have you done your homework, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: You can go on.

MORITZ: Where are you going?

MELCHIOR: For a walk.

ERNST: It'll soon be dark.

LAMMERMEIER: What about your prep?

MELCHIOR: I like walking in the dark.

HANS: Central America – Ludwig the Fifth – sixty verses of Homer – seven quadratic equations...

MELCHIOR: To hell with prep.

GEORG: There's that Latin to do by tomorrow.

MORITZ: You can't think of a single thing without prep interfering.

LAMMERMEIER: I'm going home.

GEORG: Me too. To do my homework.

ERNST: Me too, me too.

HANS: Good night, Melchior.

MELCHIOR: Sleep well.

(All go except MELCHIOR and MORITZ)

I'd really like to know what we're supposed to be doing in this world.

MORITZ: What are we supposed to be doing at school? I'd rather have been a carthorse. I'd like to know what exams are for. So they can fail us. Seven of us have got to fail anyway, the next classroom only holds sixty... Ever since Christmas everything's felt strange – I'm so separate... God, if it wasn't for Father I'd just go away, pack up my rucksack and go off walking.

MELCHIOR: Let's talk about something else.

(They walk)

MORITZ: A bird flew in through my window this morning. That means bad luck of some sort.

MELCHIOR: D'you believe in all that?

MORITZ: I don't really know. It flew out again without going round the room. I think that makes it all right.

MELCHIOR: It's as bad as religion. Like Scylla and Charybdis. You think you're safe, sailing untouched past the Scylla of all that religion nonsense, and there's the Charybdis of omens and superstitions waiting to suck you down. Let's sit under this tree. There's a warm wind blowing down from the hills. All the snow must be melting. That's where

I'd like to be now, up there – all night in the treetops – rocking and swaying in the wind.

MORITZ: Undo your collar, Melchior.

MELCHIOR: Yes, let the wind in.

MORITZ: It's getting so dark. I can hardly see you, Melchior...
d'you think the feeling of shame – in man – d'you think it's because of his upbringing?

MELCHIOR: I was thinking about that only the other day. It's deeply rooted in human nature. I mean – if you think of yourself with nothing on – undressing in front of your best friend. You wouldn't do it. Not unless he was undressing at the same time. Of course convention must have a lot to do with it.

MORITZ: If I ever have to bring up children I've worked out what I'm going to do. They'll all live together in the same room, boys and girls, all sleep in one big bed. They could help each other to dress and undress. And when the warm wind comes all they'll need to wear is a short tunic – plain white – with a leather belt. If they grew up like that I'm sure they'd be less ashamed than us.

MELCHIOR: Fine. And tell me what you'll do when the girls have babies?

MORITZ: What d'you mean, have babies?

MELCHIOR: Don't you think there'd be a certain instinct at work? Suppose you took two kittens – a boy and a girl – and shut them away – left them. Sooner or later you'd have a litter on your hands, wouldn't you, even with no grown-up cats to show them how.

MORITZ: I suppose with animals it just happens.

MELCHIOR: I think humans are just the same. Look here, Moritz, those boys and girls of yours in the same bed – and then, out of the blue, out of the dark, the first – you know – effects of puberty... I'd give you any odds...

MORITZ: (*Doubtful*) I'm sure you're right – but all the same...

MELCHIOR: And it won't be just the boys, you know. Not that all girls are the same... Probably you can't always tell...

Oh it's a safe bet. And you'd have curiosity on your side.

MORITZ: Yes... By the way I rather want to ask you something...

MELCHIOR: All right.

MORITZ: You will answer, won't you?

MELCHIOR: Of course I will.

MORITZ: The truth?

MELCHIOR: Of course. Well, Moritz?

MORITZ: ...Have you done that Latin composition yet?

MELCHIOR: You don't need to change the subject you know. There's no one here.

MORITZ: Of course my children would be working, all day long. Farming or in the garden, or strenuous games – gym, riding, rock-climbing. And they'd have to sleep on the floor, or in the open, not in soft beds like us – that's what makes us weak... I'm certain we wouldn't dream, sleeping rough.

MELCHIOR: Yes, I'm sleeping in my hammock. I've put my bed away and I won't use it again till the wine harvest's over. Last winter – I dreamt once – I was whipping our dog. I whipped him so much he couldn't move – he was lying there... That's the worst dream I've ever had. Why are you looking at me like that?

MORITZ: So it has happened to you?

MELCHIOR: What?

MORITZ: What you said.

MELCHIOR: The effects of puberty.

MORITZ: Yes.

MELCHIOR: Certainly.

MORITZ: Me too...

MELCHIOR: Ages ago.

MORITZ: It hit me like a thunderbolt.

MELCHIOR: Have you dreamt?

MORITZ: Just once. Quite short. Legs in knitted stockings – bright blue – rising up over my desk... Actually I think just climbing over. I only saw them for a moment.

MELCHIOR: Georg Tirschnitz dreamt about his mother.

MORITZ: Did he tell you that himself?

MELCHIOR: Yes, why not?

MORITZ: If you knew what I've been through since that night.

MELCHIOR: Guilt?

MORITZ: Guilt? No, no... I've realized what hell means... and if I died...

MELCHIOR: Good God.

MORITZ: It felt like some poison – a poison from inside. I started a journal: I've written down my whole life. It was the only thing that made me feel better. Honestly, Melchior – the Garden of Gethsemane must have been rather like this...

MELCHIOR: It didn't take me like that. It was a bit shaming, but that's all.

MORITZ: And you're almost a year younger than me.

MELCHIOR: That doesn't mean a thing. It can start at any age. That blond lout Lammermeier, he's three years older than us and Hans Rilow says he still dreams about fruitcake and chocolates.

MORITZ: How did he find that out?

MELCHIOR: He asked him.

MORITZ: I couldn't ask anybody that.

MELCHIOR: You just asked me.

MORITZ: My God, yes, so I did. Perhaps Hans has written his journal too. Honestly, life... What a game... We're pushed into it, and then we're expected to give thanks to God. I didn't ask for all this. Why can't I just sleep, till the silence comes back? My parents could have had any one out of a hundred children – and they got me. And I don't even know

how. I'm just here – being made to suffer because I didn't stay away. Melchior... don't you ever wonder – I mean in what way – we manage to get here – into this whirlpool?

MELCHIOR: So you really don't know then?

MORITZ: How d'you expect me to know? All right, chickens lay eggs, and I was told once that Mother carried me near her heart. And I can remember being five and looking the other way when someone turned up that queen of hearts with that low neckline. I don't have to do that any more – but nowadays I can hardly speak to a girl without feeling as if I'm loathsome – and I don't know why...

MELCHIOR: I'll tell you. I've learnt all about it, from books, from pictures, partly from observing nature. It'll surprise you. I turned atheist. I told Georg Tirschnitz. He wanted to tell Hans Rilow, but Rilow was shown everything long ago by his governess.

MORITZ: I looked at the whole of Meyer's shorter encyclopaedia. Nothing but a lot of words, they don't tell you a thing. Just – shame. What's the use of an encyclopaedia that doesn't answer the real questions?

MELCHIOR: Well. You've seen two dogs playing in the street...

MORITZ: No... Don't go on, not now. I've still got Central America and Ludwig the Fifth, and then those sixty verses of Homer and seven equations, and the Latin composition – I'd only do badly again tomorrow. If I'm going to keep working I've got to *be* a carthorse – an ox – with blinkers on.

MELCHIOR: Come home with me. It'll only take me an hour for the whole lot. I'll put a few mistakes in yours and we've finished. Then Mother can make us some lemon tea and we'll settle down for a nice cosy chat about reproduction.

MORITZ: I can't chat about reproduction, Melchior. No... no, couldn't you write it all out, everything you know – clear, unambiguous – stick it in one of my books during break and I'll take it home without knowing. One day it'll just

turn up. So I'll have to look through it however much work there is piling up. And if it's absolutely essential – you could put a few diagrams in the margin.

MELCHIOR: You're like a little girl, Moritz. Still, it'll be an interesting piece of work. You haven't ever seen a girl, I suppose?

MORITZ: Yes, I have.

MELCHIOR: All over?

MORITZ: Completely. On Shrove Tuesday I slipped into the anatomy museum. If anyone had caught me I'd have been expelled. It was like waking up on a new day... everything there, it was the truth – such beauty...

MELCHIOR: Oh. Well, then illustrations won't be necessary.

MORITZ: No... of course not... Of course you've seen it...

MELCHIOR: That time in Frankfurt, when I was there with Mother last summer, one day. You're going, Moritz?

MORITZ: I must work... Good night.

MELCHIOR: See you tomorrow.

SCENE THREE

(THEA, WENDLA *and* MARTHA *come along the street arm in arm*)

MARTHA: Are your shoes wet?

THEA: They're soaking.

MARTHA: So are mine.

WENDLA: Doesn't the wind burn your cheeks.

THEA: Can you feel your heart?

WENDLA: Let's go on the bridge. Ilse told me the river's nearly over the wall. It's full of trees and bushes. The boys have got a raft out. She said Melchi Gabor was nearly carried off yesterday.

THEA: And he's a marvellous swimmer.

MARTHA: He'd need to be.